

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Year Ending December 31, 1954

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NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in shows opening during the year 1954. The number opposite the name indicates the pages on which each is found in NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS. We regret that we cannot include the various cast changes, but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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"House of Flowers"

Daily Mirror

December 31, 1954

'House of Flowers' Offers Sensational Sincopation

By ROBERT COLEMAN

A tropical hurricane called "House of Flowers" swept into the Alvin Theatre Thursday evening, and devastated a distinguished first-night audience. Truman Capote and Harold Arlen are responsible for the whirlwind of song and dance.

LIBRETTIST CAPOTE chronicles the feud between the shrewd mistresses of bordellos on an island in the West Indies. Two innocents from the country are caught in city intrigues, and undergo adventures that would make even Sinbad the Sailor gasp, before finding happiness in a real house of flowers on their native hills.

THE BOOK IS short on humor, and long on excitement and color. The jokes are rough and rowdy, but they fall between peaks of sensuous rhythm. For Arlen has composed a score that makes the pulses race. And, after all, the wordage doesn't really matter, while the musical storm is raging.

Producer Saint Subber has found just the right people to harness the torrid tempest. Oliver Messel has designed exotic and lush sets and costumes. Peter Brook has staged the carnival in gala style. And Herbert Ross has choreographed a stirring cavalcade of sexy and eerie folk steps.

Subber also has been fortunate in having the inimitable Pearl Bailey impersonate the ruthless and ribald Madame Fleur. Such is Miss Bailey's genius that with a lift of an eyebrow or the toss of a hip, she can make a leaden line ring as if it were pure gold. And she has no equal when it comes to sophisticated sincopation.

JUANITA HALL, the unforgettable Bloody Mary of "South

"HOUSE OF FLOWERS"

Musical with book by Truman Capote, music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Messrs. Capote and Arlen; staged by Peter Brook; sets and costumes by Oliver Messel; dances and musical numbers by Herbert Ross; lighting by Jean Rosenthal; musical director, Jerry Arlen; orchestration by Ted Royal; presented by Saint Subber at the Alvin Theatre, December 30, 1954. The cast:

Tulip.....Dolores Harper
Gladiola.....Ada Moore
Pansy.....Enid Mosier
Do.....Winston George Henriques
Don't.....Solomon Earl Green
Mother.....Miriam Burton

Ottile alias Violet.....
Diahann Carroll
Madame Fleur.....Pearl Bailey
Captain Jones.....Ray Walston
Madame Tango.....Juanita Hall
Mamselle Ibo-Lele.....
Pearl Reynolds
The Sisters Meringue.....Leu
Comacho, Margot Small
Mamselle Honolulu.....Mary McToy
Mamselle Cigarette.....
Glory Van Scott
Royal.....Rawn Spearman
The Champion.....Geoffrey Holder
Chief of Police.....Don Redman
Carmen.....Carmen de Lavallade
Alvin.....Alvin Alley
Monsieur Jamison.....Dino DiLuca
The Hougman.....Frederick O'Neal

Pacific" brings a sultry sense of humor to the rival Madame Tango. Diahann Carroll, making her stage debut, has charm and quality as Ottile, the naive victim of unscrupulous worldlings. Geoffrey Holder gives you goose pimples with his weird voodoo incantations.

Frederick O'Neal, one of our favorite actors, is in fine form as a flamboyant witch doctor. And appreciative bows are due

Rawn Spearman, Ray Walston, Dino DiLuca, Ada Moore, Enid Mosier and Dolores Harper.

"House of Flowers," for all its faults, is a fascinating fiesta. It moves with the speed of a rocket. It gives off sparks like a Roman candle. It's the town's newest sensation. But take our word for it, leave your sedate Aunt Minnie at home, or you'll have a lot of explaining to do.

DAILY NEWS

December 31, 1954

'House of Flowers' Rich in Music And Exotically Set and Costumed

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is too bad, and possibly disastrous, that Truman Capote conceived the first scene of "House of Flowers" out of a dirty little mind, for, once the plot and dialog have been shoved aside to make room for the scenery, the actors and the music, the show is magnificent. It opened last evening at the Alvin Theatre.

The plot, which rapidly dwindles down, concerns Pearl Bailey and Juanita Hall, who own rival houses of assignation on an island somewhere in the West Indies. Among Miss Bailey's staff of girls is a sweet young one whom she is saving for a rich white man. The initial exposition of this situation is about on a par dramatically with the late and unlamented "Black-Eyed Susan," and is an

illustration of the odd and sad fact that some practitioners in the theatre are so unsophisticated as to be unable to judge the difference between good taste and bad.

However, once "House of Flowers" gets going as a musical show, it is extraordinary, exotic and jam full of grand new Harold Arlen music. The program bills Miss Bailey as the star, and with this one cannot quibble, for here is a singing comedienne with fine style and grace. But, excellent as

she is, I'd bill Oliver Messel and Arlen above her, and put Jean Rosenthal next.

Fabulous Settings

Messel, the scene and costume designer, has devised some of the most beautiful pictures I have ever seen on a stage, and Jean Rosenthal has lighted them to perfection. The opening setting is of the rival establishments of Madames Bailey and Hall—a work of exquisite delicacy and exotic color. For succeeding settings Messel has designed a wealth of spectacle, from a weird jungle hut to a pair of sensuous boudoirs. Messel is an enormously imaginative stage artist and costume-designer, and his lovely trappings for "House of Flowers" make the works of Cecil Beaton look like

something out of an old laundry bag.

Arlen, who has always been one of my favorite composers of popular music, has supplied the show with so many vivid and catching West Indian melodies and rhythms that it is difficult to name the outstanding ones, but I suppose the best of them is "Two Ladies in de Shade of de Banana Tree." Excitingly orchestrated by Ted Royal and admirably played by an orchestra directed by Jerry Arlen, this is the season's most fetching score.

Remarkable Dances

Not far down on my star list for the new musical is Herbert Ross, who has staged the dances. He, too, has imagination and great skill. And there is a dance devised and performed by Geoffrey Holder which is a weird and fascinating novelty. Diahann Carroll and Rawn Spearman, as a pair of young lovers who get lost in the Capote book, sing and act very pleasantly.

I've never been to the West Indies. But if they look the way Messel looks, sound the way Arlen makes them sound, and if the people move the way Ross makes them dance, I want to go there. Without Capote.

"House of Flowers"—continued

New York Post

December 31, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

Musical Tour of a Caribbean Isle

Although Truman Capote's book for "House of Flowers" seems rather to have withered away during the process of production, the new musical play by Mr. Capote and Harold Arlen, which opened last night at the Alvin Theater, is so colorful, exotic and generally enlivening an entertainment that its frailty as a story doesn't much matter. Aided particularly by enchanting sets and costumes and some excitingly dynamic dancing, this girl-and-music tour of a West Indies island gives every indication of being the town's newest hit.

There are a number of important contributors to the attractiveness of "House of Flowers," and I am inclined to think that the foremost is Oliver Messel, whose taste and imagination, in designing both the scene and the clothes result in what is one of the most glowing and beautiful physical productions in my re-

cent theater going memory. Mr. Messel is an authentic artist, and he has brought to the evening a sense of color and design that provides not only a remarkably picturesque loveliness but also a dramatic feeling for exotic appeal.

The Dances

The dances, too, are, in addition to their virtues of excitement, fitted dramatically into the proceedings in a fashion that makes the absence of much of a formal story all the less important. Whether they are authentic or not, I am in no position to

know but, what is more vital, they seem to be, and, in Herbert Ross' choreography, they succeed in being humorous, thrilling, touching and sinister in turn, emphasizing the mood and atmosphere of the narrative in brilliant fashion. In every way, they are delightful to watch.

It is, indeed, one of the most commendable virtues of "House of Flowers" that all of it seems so well integrated. For example, Mr. Arlen's score, while certainly not one of his most brilliant, is always in the proper mood and spirit, and, in his songs, there is a feeling of authenticity that makes one believe that they belong to the West Indies island and to the people who are singing them. At the moment, my favorite is a number called "Two Ladies in de Shade of de Banana Tree," but all of them are engaging and most attractively sung.

The Rivals

What story there is deals with the rivalry between the two female proprietors of neighboring bordellos, and, in particular, with the naive and innocent inmate of one of the houses, who wants

to marry a boy from the hills, rather than go off with the rich man who desires her. There isn't much left of the narrative, but it does serve as a framework for the dances, songs and atmospheric color of the island. And this picturesque Caribbean tour includes such pleasant interludes as a Mardi Gras, a cock fight dramatized by the spectators' backs, and the macabre dance of a splendidly monstrous fellow called Baron of the Cemetery.

Pearl Bailey, who can even make forgetfulness of lines a gay part of the show, is, as usual, in splendid form as the lady who runs the place called Malson des Fleurs, and so is Juanita Hall in the smaller part of her rival, Diahann Carroll brings a lovely voice and a winning sweetness of manner to the role of the ingenuous girl, and Ray Walston makes a believable character of a worthless smuggler. Frederic O'Neal has two good scenes as an amiable voodoo man, and Geoffrey Holder dances excitingly, particularly as the Cemetery Baron. "House of Flowers" is a beautiful and likeable show.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 31, 1954

THEATER

'House of Flowers'

By WALTER F. KERR

In the Indies

"HOUSE of Flowers" starts off in a riot of promise. The adumptuous new musical at the Alvin, with book and lyrics by Truman Capote and a tantalizing score by Harold Arlen, takes wings with the overture itself, a magical medley that begins with the blast of a police whistle and ends in a cascade of drums. Looking back on things, I'd have been happy if they'd played it twice.

The rise of the curtain suggests further riches. A pair of rival bordellos, on an island somewhere in the better-kept Indies, face each other across a dazzling stage. Oliver Messel has spilled some genie's treasure-chest of radiant pastels over the landscape, then animated it with crawling flora calculated to knock your eye out. Enormous sunflower vines—I guess they're sunflower vines—smirk from the facade of Madame Fleur's (fondee 1910). A gramophone

that is not only shaped but painted like a morning-glory leers over the footlights. A red-fringed hammock sways in the breeze, and a trio of very available girls—they are called Pansy, Gladiola, and Tulip—discuss their fortunate "position in society."

A few minutes later the Alvin is being genially rocked with the head-on, no nonsense camaraderie of one Pearl Bailey. Miss Bailey is pointing out that "One Man Ain't Enough," and Harold Arlen is helping her by giving her a long, low, rolling rhythm that glides by itself from portal to portal.

As Miss Bailey slaps her hands against the proscenium, rests her head while waiting for a little applause, or drops into the lyrics a growing suggestion that an ad lib would go very well here, she is easily raffish, demonically secure, justifiably confident. There are other times in the entertainment when she levels her eyes at the audience,

lifts a what-the-hell shoulder, and speaks the composer's mind: she is fine in "What Is a Friend For?" in a mocking chant with her trio of employees, "Has I Let You Down?" and in some rowdy dialogue exchanges with actor Ray Walston.

If she has a rival in the show's musical department, it is a plaintive and extraordinarily appealing ingenue named Diahann Carroll. Miss Carroll plays the youngest inmate of Madame Fleur's establishment, a romantic lass who is in love with an up-country boy and is willing to give up a certain amount of high-life in exchange for him. Several of Mr. Arlen's most evocative songs, "A Sleepin' Bee" and "House of Flowers" among them, fall to this engaging actress, and she delivers them with serious eyes and the enthusiasm of a newly hatched bird. Juanita Hall, as the Madame across the street, throws a jolly tango, and the working-girls (Dolores Harper, Ada Moore and Enid Mosier) open up sassy throats to make a winner out of "Two Ladies in de Shade of de Banana Tree."

The singers, in short, are very much on their mettle. By the time four or five numbers have been clocked off, however, it is clear that something is missing in "House of Flowers."

After an impudent first scene, comedy is given the cold shoul-

der. Though the Capote-Arlen lyrics are simple and attractive in the ballads, there is little humor to be strained from the more festive attempts; indeed, Miss Bailey gets her best laugh during one of the more laborious lyric jests by simply announcing that "Mother can't clean this one up no more."

With the disappearance of the initial comic vein, there is a gap to be filled either by sentiment or by exotic local color. Both are tried, both are tepid. The love story is at best fragmentary; the dances and the island mumbo-jumbo become alarmingly conventional. Fingers are snapped, hands clapped, shoulders swiveled and tom-toms pounded with furious energy. But the patterns are repetitious, the show's inventiveness runs down hill, and "House of Flowers" turns into a procession of production numbers that diminish in flavor.

It's an adventurous try, and all sorts of talent has gone into the effort to give musical comedy a fresh, saucy, strangely colorful shape. But Mr. Capote has run out of inspiration too soon, and the violence of drum beats cannot quite conceal the fact that a charming vision is slowly vanishing before our eyes.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

December 31, 1954

'House of Flowers' Really Blossoms Out

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It's a gaudy, bawdy, tropical, horticultural show, "House of Flowers" at the Alvin.

New York has not had a first-rate Negro musical for too many years. It has never had one with such elegance and chic. The stage is a tinsel fantasy on a Caribbean Island, where love has many meanings. ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ The background is Rabelaisian as the



ladies of two neighboring houses of questionable repute engage in voluble rivalry.

In Pearl Bailey's establishment, the tenants dress like pagan debutantes, and lie around waiting for their ships to come in. At Juanita Hall's Academy, the girls teach dancing for an ostensible living.

Pearl has a charming country girl whom she is saving for a rainy day. In a pinch,

she plans to hire out the girl for purely decorative purposes to a rich gentleman.

But the girl falls in love, and Pearl has to kidnap her beau. After a great deal of voodoo witchery it all comes out happily.

Lovely to Look At.

Except for a couple of slowed down items at the very end, "House of Flowers" is a riotous show, gay with tunes, awesome for its flip-pant humor, and lovely to look at.

You have to catch "Mother" Bailey trailing a dozen yards of white feather-bow around while she sings about her friends. Nobody in the theater has her deady aim or deceptive relaxation. To that, add the haunting voice and the good looks of the dame, and you have a star.

As her rival, Juanita Hall has a special bulbous elegance that is Victorian, just as one finds grandes dames in the West Indies. "Slide, Boy, Slide" is her best, very rhythmic number.

Diahann Carroll is a great find as the Innocent Violet. She has a rich, lovely, easy

voice, and rare freshness of personality. Alone or with certain others, she has three of Harold Arlen's finest songs in the lovely ballad "I Never Has Seen Snow," "A Sleepin' Bee" and "House of Flowers."

Of the rest of the score "Two Ladies in De Shade of De Banana Tree" looks like liest to linger.

A Funny Trio.

There is a wry and funny trio of blossoms played by Dolores Harper, Ada Moore and especially Enid Mosier. An engaging natural performance is offered by Rawn Spearman as a country boy, and Frederick O'Neal enacts a witch doctor with winning villainy.

The brilliant and original scenery of Oliver Messel is no surprise. His costumes are gems of impertinent comment on the characters' various professions. And Herbert Ross keeps the boards scorched with vigorous dancing.

Truman Capote is responsible for the whole idea of "House of Flowers," and it is a real bouquet in his hat.

Journal ~~of the~~ American

December 31, 1954

Capote Play Big, Beautiful

Author of Book Held to Blame
For a Not So Funny Musical

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE combined talents of Truman Capote and Harold Arlen should produce something soaring in the musical comedy world, but unfortunately "House of Flowers," their big, beautiful biplane which taxied into the Alvin Theatre last night never quite became airborne.

This is a tragedy in many ways: Arlen has written some of his best tunes for it, Oliver Messel has provided sets and curtains that should be taken away and put on permanent display, and Pearl Bailey rises occasionally to moments which might be carved in diamond discs, for posterity. The onus seems to fall upon Mr. Capote,

whose book is neither ingenious nor very funny and is often plain vulgar; there is nothing singularly exciting in the production numbers, and even the direction at times seems faltering.

Cheap Jokes

There may be a tasteful way to tell the story of two bor-

dellos (their madams, the inmates), and it doesn't matter if they're located in Trinidad or Tarrytown, but Mr. Capote has not found the answer. There seemed too much preoccupation with the intimacies of the industry, too many cheap and easy jokes. The whole thing reaches some sort of crescendo in a number called "Slide, Boy, Slide" which might be acceptable in a Minsky grind academy—except it isn't comical enough.

The whole thing is an unhappy juxtaposition—there is so much that is pleasant to the eye and ear, played against so much that is squalid.

If it were a more serious consideration of the love story, the romance of the innocent ward of one of the madames with the boy from the hills, it could have had a chance as a lovely mood piece. Or it could have gone all the other way and become a riotous West Indies romp—in which case it should have been much faster and funnier.

Pearl Bailey was not at her best, which may have been due to first-nightitis, but she still delivered several numbers which will make history for herself and Mr. Arlen. I liked particularly "Don't Like Good-byes" and "What Is a Friend

For." Then there is this new little girl, Diahann Carroll, making her debut, who revealed the most unbelievable poise and held up the proceedings with the show's best popular songs, "A Sleepin' Bee," "House of Flowers" and "I Never Has Seen Snow." She is also a quite remarkable actress.

Lauds Spearman

Rawn Spearman plays the boy she loves; he is appealing, knows his business and has a fine voice. Mention should also include Frederick O'Neal, whose versatility seems to be limitless; Juanita Hall who, unfortunately, will probably never be handed another song to top "Ball-Hi" which she introduced in "South Pacific"; Ada Moore, Enid Mosier and Dolores Harper, as three of the best operators in Miss Hall's emporium; Geoffrey Holder, an incredible Voo-doo dancer; Ray Walston, the no-good boat captain, and two small parties, Winston George Henriques and Solomon Earl Green, who dance in and out with exquisite self-assurance.

Perhaps everyone expected too much from "House of Flowers." I, for one, didn't think it was forthcoming.

"House of Flowers"—continued

The New York Times

December 31, 1954

Alvin Theatre Offers 'House of Flowers'

By **BROOKS ATKINSON**

AFTER concentrating on his work for some time Truman Capote has emerged from his library with a musical about a bordello, "House of Flowers," which opened at the Alvin Thursday evening.

This is standard practice in American literature, for the bordello is the symbol of meriment. It is to be feared that, apart from the scenery and costumes "House of Flowers" is a standard musical play in its own right. Mr. Capote's feeling for the joint is perfunctory.

The scenery and costumes are by the British designer,

Oliver Messel. Given a lush West Indian locale, he has opened the play with the brilliant facades of two pleasure houses in a style that might be regarded as modernistic rococo. As lighted by the talented Jean Rosenthal, it is a sensuous, lazy setting with flowers that are barbarically lovely.

None of the other scenery is quite so amazing. But Mr. Messel has contributed a number of interesting curtains. And his costumes have the flamboyance and bizarries of the opulent tropics. Visually, this is a stunning show.

But everything else leans toward the commonplace. Mr. Capote has invented a trickle of story about a pure romance that flowers out of the scarlet haven of lonely men. The book runs through the West Indian routine of voodoo dances; and the dialogue plays various changes on the single-entendre. But there is none of the talent in it that made "The Grass Harp" such a tender and mem-

orable show. And Mr. Capote's lyrics are elementary.

Even the music is commonplace. Harold Arlen wrote the score. It begins with an uninteresting overture and continues through the familiar set pieces of business-like musicals. Apart from one or two interpolated numbers, and constant drumming, the score does not make much use of West Indian sources. Mr. Arlen's big numbers are second-rate Broadway or Hollywood.

Pearl Bailey is the star performer. Throwing away songs with smart hauteur and strutting impressively, she has an amusing style but feeble material. The ingenue is Diahann Carroll, a pleasant young lady with a sweet voice and a winning manner. As the matron of a rival bordello, Juanita Hall, promoted in culture from the coarseness of Bloody Mary, looks impudent and aggressive. But she has nothing extraordinary to sing. Ray Walston is

excellent as a soiled smuggler, and Frederick O'Neal does the best he can for the mechanical role of a voodoo magician.

Every Negro show includes wonderful dancing. "House of Flowers" is no exception in that respect. Tall and short Negroes, adults and youngsters, torrid maidens in flashy costumes and bare-chested bucks break out into a number of wild, grotesque, animalistic dances. And a steel band provides a haunting accompaniment. Apart from an ingenious ballet representing sea monsters, the dances look and sound alike by the time of the second act.

West Indian bagnios are hot Mr. Capote's forte. He is appreciative, but he lacks the flair of the real troubadour of sin. Maybe we should forget about the brothels. They are getting to be a bore.

"Anastasia"

New York Post

December 30, 1954

By **Richard Watts Jr.**

The Case of the Czar's Daughter

It was love that kept the Bolsheviks from having a dangerous enemy on their hands in the person of a mysterious young lady who turned out to be the legitimate Czarina of All the Russias. Maybe she wouldn't have regained the throne of her slaughtered father anyway, but the men in

the Kremlin should be thankful that the beautiful Anastasia, who was picked up while an outcast on the streets of Berlin, saw through the ruthless selfishness of the scoundrels who found her and learned that the respect of the Dowager Empress was greater than a crown.

This, in general, is the subject matter of "Anastasia," which opened last night at the Lyceum Theatre, and I hope I don't sound too lofty or patronizing in setting down what the new play is about. For Guy Bolton's adaptation of the French drama by Marcelle Maurette, which was originally a celebrated television show in London, is unquestionably old-fashioned, sentimental, rococo and somewhat neo-Sardou in its manner, but it does get its ro-

mantic effects. And it gives two fine actresses an opportunity to get their teeth into striking roles.

Since it is one of the virtues of "Anastasia" that it goes into unashamed opportunities for bravura playing, it is probably those two actresses who should be mentioned first. In the title part, Viveca Lindfors has a fine emotional gamut to run, beginning as the dazed, uncertain waif, who is accepted as a fraud by a conniving group of White Russian refugees, and going through the process of recalling her regal past until, at the end, she walks out scornfully on the men who are planning to use her. I thought she managed it splendidly.

With all enthusiastic credit to her, however, it is the veteran

Eugenie Leontovich who dominates the proceedings. As the Dowager Empress, stern, haughty and skeptical, who is first, convinced that Anastasia is an imposter, but slowly comes to realize the truth of the girl's story and to respect her, Miss Leontovich has all the force and imperious skill of the brilliantly authoritative actress of the old school. It is a performance of power and quiet guile, and it is delightful to watch her in the assured mastery of her art.

I don't think it is possible to take "Anastasia" very seriously as a play. It has an operatic manner about it that makes you wonder when the first aria is going to be sung. Then, too, its frankly sentimental attitude toward oppressed ex-royalty and its conviction that a true Romanoff may be down but never out make for less dramatic conviction than its early scenes of suspense when the selfish plotters are wondering if they can get away with their game. But its old-fashioned appeal has a curiously entertaining quality in its sheer frankness.

As all the plays seem to be this season, it is well acted. In addition to the notable work of Miss Lindfors and Miss Leontovich, there are good, colorful performances by Joseph Anthony as the chief of the White Russian plot-

"ANASTASIA"

Play by Marcelle Maurette, adapted by Guy Bolton; staged by Alan Schneider; setting by Ben Edwards; presented by Elaine Perry at the Lyceum Theatre, December 29, 1954. The cast: Chernov..... Boris Tumarin Varya..... Sefton Darr Petrovich..... David J. Stewart Prince Boumine..... Joseph Anthony Sergei..... William Callan Anna..... Viveca Lindfors Counsellor Drivinitz..... Carl Low Sleigh Driver..... Stuart Germain Charwoman..... Vivian Nathan Dr. Sirensky..... Michael Strong Dowager Empress.....

Eugenie Leontovich Baroness Livenbaum..... Dorothy Patten Prince Paul..... Hurd Hatfield

ters, David J. Stewart and Boris Tumarin as his followers, Michael Strong as a doctor who loves Anastasia, and Hurd Hatfield as a Romanoff who is, of course, basically noble. "Anastasia" is outspokenly sentimental in spirit and rather antiquely romantic in manner, but, on its own terms, it does achieve its effects.

The New York Times

December 30, 1954

Theatre: The Mystery of 'Anastasia'

Adaptation from French
Opens at the Lyceum

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHATEVER the truth may be of the Anastasia mystery, the drama about it is superb. Logically enough, it is called "Anastasia," and it opened at the Lyceum Wednesday evening.

Marcelle Maurette wrote it originally in French and Guy Bolton has made the English adaptation. It is the story of the unhappy woman who appeared out of the mists nearly thirty years ago and whom many people regard as the one surviving royal princess of Old Russia.

Whether the play is a clever melodrama or a sincere gesture toward art is an academic point that cannot be decided here at the moment. For in the second act the play is overwhelmed by two pieces of acting that came

out of the theatre's treasure chest.

It is the scene in which the venerable Dowager Empress recognizes Anastasia as her granddaughter. Eugenie Leontovich is the Dowager Empress. Viveca Lindfors is Anastasia. At first the Empress is skeptical and scornful; and Anastasia, seeing for the first time a blood relative who escaped the firing squad, is broken-hearted. What she longs for most is love. Something she says startles and touches the Empress. She drops her mask of cynical worldliness and humbly embraces her granddaughter.

The scene is written with skill and taste. Miss Leontovich and Miss Lindfors play it magnificently. Miss Leontovich hard and witty; Miss Lindfors beautiful and grateful—it is a profoundly moving episode. For Miss Leontovich has all the authority of royalty, and the technique of a queenly actress, and Miss Lindfors has the

grace, intelligence and pride of royalty rejected but accepted at last. It is a stunning scene that left a grateful audience limp last evening.

Otherwise, "Anastasia" is an exciting mystery drama written with respect for the chief figures involved. The stakes are the Czar's fortune in a bank in Sweden. A scheming Russian prince and some unsavory accomplices promote the person who calls herself Anastasia as the authentic princess and the sole heir of the fortune. They arrange to cut themselves in on the fortune.

But slowly it appears that the sick and bedraggled creature is the Princess, and the play hovers between fraud and pathos. There is a lot more to "Anastasia"—all of it exciting, some of it fine and poignant; and there is little doubt that audiences will hang on the mystery all season.

"Anastasia" has been staged

by Alan Schneider, who has been directing plays in New York with notable competence. The staging of "Anastasia" puts him in the first rank of directors. Through taste and skill he has raised a play that might sound like cheap opportunism to the level of a grave and impressive drama that has style.

Everyone looks like an artist under Mr. Schneider's direction—Joseph Anthony as a malign though exuberant prince; Hurd Hatfield as another prince of more exalted stature; Boris Tumarin as a highly amusing Russian banker full of apprehension; Michael Strong as a compassionate doctor who loves the princess; David Stewart as an excitable Russian artist; Dorothy Patten as a frivolous lady in waiting. There is also a little gem of acting by Vivian Nathan as a shy though motherly peasant whose simplicity and love comfort the princess in a wretched situation.

The single setting of a large room in a mansion has been ably designed and splendidly furnished by Ben Edwards. Altogether, "Anastasia" provides an absorbing evening in the theatre and a transcendent one when Miss Leontovich and Miss Lindfors play their great scene together.

DAILY NEWS

December 30, 1954

Rousing Romantic Melodrama, 'Anastasia,' Played to the Hilt

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Guy Bolton has been writing plays and musicals since 1911. His latest work, "Anastasia," which he adapted from a French play, could have come in those golden days of his youth in form and manner, if not in historical content. In those days of romantic melodrama, a plot was a plot, an actor was an actor, a scene was a scene and a line was a line. Those were the meat-and-potato days, when such theatrical mountebanks as Belasco, Brady and Woods were thriving and a mood was merely some kind of a fit.

And so, in the dwindling hours of 1954, Bolton came up with "Anastasia" last evening at the Lyceum Theatre—and nothing could be more welcome. Here is Theatre with a capital T—not art, perhaps, but one grand show filled with heroes and heroines and the

dark skulduggery of a most enchanting villain. Elaine Perry has given it a fine production. Alan Schneider has directed it with lip-smacking relish, and such actors as Eugenie Leontovich, Viveca Lindfors and Joseph Anthony play it to the hilt. All of it made me feel young again.

History or Fiction?

The period of "Anastasia" is somewhat later than the days of Bolton's youth, being the early weeks of 1926. The scene is a house in Berlin, where an exiled Russian prince and two shady associates have been selling stock in a scheme to produce the last living daughter

of the Czar and thus lay claim to ten million pounds sterling which the Czar had in foreign banks at the time of the Bolshevik revolution.

The legend of Princess Anastasia is a fascinating one—or is it the truth? There still lives a woman who declares she is the Czarina of All the Russias. Many sober historians have recorded that when the Czar and 10 members of his family were shot in a cellar by the Bolsheviks, one child, Anastasia, was not killed. She was found alive in a pile of bodies in a mine which became the grave of the others, was smuggled out of Russia, and after much suffering from wounds and a long period of amnesia in an asylum, regained her identity.

Lovely Performances

And so, in Berlin in 1926, this former Cossack officer and his two

pals, faced with an ultimatum to produce their princess or be jailed for fraud, find a likely girl. A pitifully drab, hungry girl who did in fact once tell people in an asylum that she was Anastasia. They feed her, clothe her, threaten her and coach her in the role she is to assume—for she must pass searching tests, including examination by the Dowager Empress of Russia, who is living in Berlin.

Well, is the girl they found in the play last night a fraud, or is she the real Anastasia? I shan't tell you, because it would be much more fun for you to find out yourself. But I can tell you that Miss Lindfors gives a lovely performance as the waif who gradually takes on regal airs, and Miss Leontovich gives an absolutely exquisite performance as the old empress. And Anthony, as the chief of the ruthless schemers, is the best swashbuckling villain in many a timid Broadway season.

Hurd Hatfield is a great help as Prince Paul, a fortune-hunting cousin who was Anastasia's childhood playmate and sweetheart, and there are colorful performances by David J. Stewart, Boris Tumarin, Sefton Darr and Dorothy Patten. Ben Edwards' setting is in just the right mood for a fine and fruity play.

"Anastasia"—continued



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

December 30, 1954

'Anastasia' Good Old Melodrama

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is an enthralling romantic melodrama at the Lyceum, "Anastasia" by name. It is filled with suspense, love, joy, fear and chicanery.

Suppose you knew there were 10 million pounds being held for the children of the

Russian czar. If you found a girl who duplicated the only surviving princess, you would surely be tempted as Bounine was.

This vil-

laneous expatriated prince captures the girl. He abuses her amnesia and trains her to think she is the czar's lost heir.

Does Not Resist.

The true Anastasia was reputedly only injured, when the entire rest of her family was assassinated in the '16 Revolution. Now in '26, the bitter little pauper with no memory does not resist.

The big suspense is authentication. The dowager czarina is alive, and alone can approve the claimant.

In a scene of gorgeous theater, the two women meet. One begins to recall true memories. The other fights against having her old hurts disturbed. Inevitably, slowly, they acknowledge each other.

New Strength.

The revived Anastasia has new strength with her new beauty. She wins her grandmother's admiration, and a whole new life for herself. She has a royal treatment for both the millions of pounds and her childhood sweetheart.

Guy Bolton has spun out a fascinating evening of drama with this French play of Marcelle Maurette. It is based on the case of a true claimant living in Berlin. Alan Schneider directs it in a fashion that kept last night's audience holding its breath.

Viveca Lindfors gives a lovely singing quality to the rise from slouchy, leaden-footed wail, to exquisite princess. Wonder of wonders, she can even look beautiful in the

straight-cut, long-waisted costumes of the Twenties.

Tallored Role.

The role of the dowager is tailor-made for Eugenie Leontovich. She is imperious and irritable, truly commanding as the elegant czarina. Her ferocity makes you gasp when she finally succumbs to her grandchild's pleas. This is grand acting.

Joseph Anthony is a wonderfully snide villain, leering and dancing about, with a touch of genuine madness. Hurd Hatfield manages just the right superficiality for the agreeable, dull, old sweetheart.

"Anastasia" is pure romantic theater, as we all too rarely see nowadays. It looks like a real winner.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

December 30, 1954

THEATER

'Anastasia'

By WALTER F. KERR

Royal Mystery

"It's like a page out of Hans Christian Andersen," exclaims one of the ambitious rascals in the play at the Lyceum. But the trouble with "Anastasia" is that it is like two pages out of Hans Christian Andersen—one of them a farce-like frolic about a band of impious scoundrels; the other a tender and touching romance about a "Snow Queen" who finds her way home.

Playwright Guy Bolton has based his rocco melodrama on an original by Marcelle Maurette, who is in turn indebted to one of the more extravagant flights of contemporary history—or legend, if you like. A dazed and shabbily dressed young woman is rescued from the edge of a canal. It is possible that she is—or may be passed off as—the true daughter of Czar Nicholas II, spirited away from the Red Army after being left for dead. The Dow-

ager Empress, still living in Berlin, can prove or disprove her identity.

The situation is a juicy one, florid enough for really lush theater, plausible enough for honest psychological speculation. It is when the authors are taking their characters seriously, settling them down to an aching excursion into the terrifying past, that "Anastasia" comes vividly to life.

There is a long scene in the second act in which Eugenie Leontovich, as the ancient but mettlesome Empress, confronts Viveca Lindfors, the fragile and uncertain pretender who may, after all, be her granddaughter. The two meet in icy hostility. Miss Lindfors is not even certain that she wants her identity returned to her: it will force her to face the horrors of her own life once more. Miss Leontovich is a disbelieving tigress, taunting and scoffing and closing her mind to the evidence.

As these embittered figures circle one another, startle one another with echoes of the Winter Palace and the Chinese Island, stir in one another fires that have been ruthlessly banked, "Anastasia" is suddenly gripping and moving theater. The emotional scale is large—at one point Miss Lindfors is to be seen tugging childishly at her grandmother's skirts while Miss Leontovich laughs, cries, and scolds in a single outburst—but the players have fought through the sequence with utter integrity, given it weight and dignity and disturbing belief. For the time, we are genuinely touched.

But the undeniable character values of "Anastasia" are set in a framework that persistently mooks them, makes light of them, succeeds in tripping them up. The "princess" is in the hands of three light-comedy rogues, a former General (Joseph Anthony) who once came to the political parting of the ways and went both ways, a former banker (Boris Tumarin) whose gallstones are troubling him, and a former painter (David J. Stewart) who is given to clapping his hands with glee at each fortuitous turn of events.

These gentlemen are, I'm afraid, as close to clowns as any figures in a sentimental swash-buckler dare be. Closer, I guess,

The General is given to gliding about the room in spats, stretching his arms to display itching fingers, hiding in doorways in the half-light in order to overhear important conversations. The others behave, too, rather like Andersen tailors who are bound to be caught, quartered, and tied up in bags. And in the course of their wily scurrying, they are given some veritable bon-bons to hurl across the footlights: "Sometimes it surpasses the extraordinary and becomes the uncanny." "It might be amusing to give you some lessons in refined love-making," and—from one of the visitors who turn up—"Have you forgotten that evening in a field of sunflowers?"

Some responsible actors, including Vivian Nathan, Michael Strong, Hurd Hatfield, and Carl Low, work efficiently to pull the two tones of the play into reasonable harmony. So does director Alan Schneider, driving energy into every passing moment. Ben Edwards' single setting—a handsome Berlin living room lined with fake mementoes—is fine.

The big scene between two forceful and appealing performers is very nearly a square meal in itself. But the taste of fudge is a persistent one, and it spoils the fancy feast.

Daily Mirror

December 30, 1954

'Anastasia' Glitters On The Surface But It's Tinsel

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After the Reds seized Russia and murdered many of the royal family, a girl popped up in Europe claiming to be a Grand Duchess. This supposed daughter of the Czar was accepted by some exiles and disavowed by others. Marcelle Maurette fashioned a play about the controversial personality.

IT HAS BEEN adapted into English by Guy Bolton. In the Maurette-Bolton script, called "Anastasia," the speculation is that the girl was the genuine article. A brutal, lecherous and larcenous Russian prince finds her, physically and mentally ill, about to leap from a bridge in Berlin. Though he believes her to be a fake, he determines to capitalize on her resemblance to the original.

As the play unfolds at the

Lyceum Theatre, it is evident that this victim of swindlers believes the legend created about her. Once again in command of her faculties and integrity, accepted by the Dowager Empress, she refuses to marry a cousin though the alliance would bring her a big fortune.

Instead, she determines to work for a living, to lead a useful life. Presumably with an idealistic doctor who had befriended her in

Bucharest and is really in love with her, though he has considered her claims to nobility spurious.

BOLTON, TOO long absent from Broadway, proved Wednesday evening that he is still one of our more capable craftsmen. He has given this melodrama of intrigue a surface shine that often throws off sparks like good theatre. His sense of narration is admirable, his characters are showily effective and there are occasional flashes of the wit for which he was once noted.

"Anastasia" offers a field day for players, and producer Elaine Perry has found the right ones for it. Viveca Lindfors gives a sensitive and evocative performance as the girl who finally wins credence for her claims and is too sincere to cash in on them. Eugene Leonovich contributes a brilliant tour-de-force as the aged Dowager Empress. She achieves emotional impact and a wry humor that are irresistible.

Joseph Anthony, as the unscrupulous and sinister schemer,

complements their portrayals with some of the best bravura acting you are likely to see about town this semester. David J. Stewart, Boris Tamarin, Michael Strong and Hurd Hatfield make the most of their opportunities in other roles.

DIRECTOR Alan Schneider has given a gloss to this period piece that makes it seem more important than it really is, while Ben Edwards has designed one of those settings that starts an audience to applauding before the actors even begin to speak.

In the last act, the scoundrels obtain a crown studded with good paste jewels for their dupe to wear, and rent a throne from a production of "Boris Godunoff" for her to sit upon. In doing so, they unconsciously summed up our conclusions about the play.

For "Anastasia" has a gorgeous outer glitter, but, beneath, it is papier mache. It sparkles like imitation gems and is as hollow as the phony operatic prop.

Journal American

December 30, 1954

Fine Performances In Intriguing Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT IS A MATTER of historical record that the last Czar of Russia and his family were seized by the Bolsheviks in 1918 and slaughtered in a very haphazard fashion by a group of small-town executioners in somebody's cellar.

The unprofessional procedure of the killers and the general chaos in the country at the time has resulted in a legend that the youngest of the Czar's four daughters was somehow spirited to safety and is alive to this day. There is, in any case, a woman living in Germany who regards herself and can bring certain evidence to point to the fact that she is, indeed, the Grand Duchess Anastasia.

This is the background for a new play called "Anastasia," adapted by Guy Bolton from the French original of Marcelle Maurette, which was pre-

sented at the Lyceum Theatre last night.

Notable Cast

Elaine Perry has assembled a notable cast, ushered them into bright costumes and a reminiscent set and provided them with the directorial talents of Alan Schneider. But she hasn't given us a story that is equally notable or bright or reminiscent. This is an unsolved mystery, and the authors can't be blamed for not solving it, but in the meantime it seems they might have invested it with more

suspense, and certainly more charm.

Perhaps regrettably the plight of the White Russian has passed from the current scene, and it requires uncommon ingenuity and skill and, yes, humor, to get us back into the old "Tovarich" mood.

Americans are constantly meeting ex-royalty, the world is moving on at a mad and reckless pace, and we are not disposed to hold still for a consideration of the polite and consummate pride of the Romanoffs.

In "Anastasia" we are asked to be emotionally aroused by the fact that this poor woman, mentally disturbed, finally decides she is the actual daughter of the Czar but prefers to retire to a life of anonymity with the man she loves.

There is no quarrel here with her decision—but I just didn't care. At this late date I don't care what became of Judge Crater, either; not unless the story is told to me all over again in a very engaging fashion.

Praise for Actors

None of this detracts from several first-rate performances, however. Viveca Lindfors, too long absent from the local environs, re-establishes herself as a young actress of depth and assurance as the distressed possible-heir to her old man's fortune.

Eugene Leonovich, as the Dowager Empress, is superb and comes close to bringing reality to royalty; and Joseph Anthony is suave and compelling in the role of the wily Prince Bounine.

Other creditable contributions were offered by Hurd Hatfield, David J. Stewart, Boris Tamarin and Michael Strong. Ben Edwards should be offered a tasty slice of Beef Stroganoff for the costumes and backgrounds, and a cup of our best Borcht to Mr. Schneider, the director.

But it takes an almost unreasonable amount of power to score a hit on Broadway these days—and I'm afraid this one just doesn't have it.

"The Flowering Peach"



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

December 29, 1954

The Ark Sails Again In 'Flowering Peach'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

As long as Clifford Odets keeps "The Flowering Peach" in the mood of domestic comedy, it is the most amusing, warm and original of plays. When he insists on drawing a moral, and perhaps a modern parallel with his saga of Noah's Ark, the play weighs down.

The new comedy at the Belasco begins as a version of Noah and his family on their famous nautical adventure, told in terms of a Lower East Side family.

The humor is dry, cool and uproarious. The relationships are most understandable because the characters are all so recognizable.

There is Noah himself, whose enthusiasm for the old

time religion is tinged with a fancy for himself as patriarch. Then there is Mrs. Noah, or Esther, who has a tongue like a steel wedge when it comes to splitting up contention.

Sons of Noah.

The boys have their familiar traits and taints. The oldest is a natural-born capitalist.

The middle son is a chaser. The youngest is just discovering himself as a man and resists his father's seeming tyranny.

The play follows the old man's struggle to get his Ark

built, then to people and animal it, the way God instructs him.

In midstream the play takes on something of the atmosphere aboard after the first six weeks. People are testy, and arguments are thick. Noah stands for the ancient faith, which would take no initiative. The boys, particularly the clever mechanic, Japheth, want to repair their vessel, and also to steer it.

Bold Sets.

In the end we find Noah, recovering from a nine-week drunk in protest against the unruly youngsters. He has been rejuvenated by God to complete his task. Now he is forced to face the new way of thinking, and chooses to go live with the money-minded son, because it promises comfort.

The play has a striking physical production with bold, simple sets by Mordecai Gorelik and fine lighting by Feder. Alan Hovhaness has created a penetrating vocabulary of musical sound for the storm and animal effects.

The acting shows a marked chasm between the older and younger generation. Menasha Skulnik is starred as Noah, and with his rich vocal resources and fine comic timing, makes a full and memorable character of the old man.

"THE FLOWERING PEACH"

Play by Clifford Odets; staged by Mr. Odets; settings by Mordecai Gorelik; lighting by Feder; costumes by Ballou; music by Alan Hovhaness; presented by Robert Whitehead for the Producers Theatre at the Belasco Theatre, December 28, 1954. The cast: Noah.....Menasha Skulnik Esther.....Berta Gersten Japheth.....Mario Alcáide Shem.....Martin Ritt Ham.....Leon Janney Leah.....Osna Palmer Rachel.....Janice Rule Goldie.....Barbara Baxley A Strange Man.....Sidney Armus Fawns.....Marjorie Barrett and Patricia Kay Goat.....Barbara Kay First Old Man.....Ludwig Roth Second Old Man.....Sidney Kay

As his wife, Berta Gersten is a dream. Her deadpan humor and still postures depict a fleet mind a rich wit in an earnest body. It is a lovely performance.

Granted that the younger characters are not so interestingly written, there still seems no reason for them to act with so little distinction. Of the whole crowd only Barbara Baxley creates believable and affecting relations with the people around her.

DAILY NEWS

December 29, 1954

Legend of Noah Becomes a Family Squabble in 'The Flowering Peach'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "The Flowering Peach" playwright Clifford Odets turns his mind upon the legend of Noah and the Ark, and last evening Menasha Skulnik gave a most endearing performance as the fateful skipper who saved mankind to live upon this world again. However, the play itself—which has been given a nice production at the Belasco Theatre—is not as inspiring as I think Odets hoped it would be.

Somehow it has neither the nobility nor the simplicity I found in "The Green Pastures" in 1930, with Tutt Whitney playing Noah and Richard B. Harrison De Lawd.

Odets considers the adventures of those aboard the Ark as a Jewish family comedy, filled with salty squabbles. He does have in mind the general purpose of showing that, in something like a year of close confinement, people with

varying antagonisms have been forced to adjust themselves one to the other and get along in peace. Thus, the human passengers of the boat should have been trained to start a new and better breed of mankind upon this globe. The point of the play, delivered by Skulnik in the epilogue, is that we, the descendants of Noah and his wife Esther, had better keep in mind the profound lessons in peaceful relationship which the old boy learned on board his little barge.

Lot of Bickering

But Odets, instead of driving steadily toward his goal in nine

scenes, finds himself sidetracked by his interest in family bickering. Much of this bickering is funny, thanks to Skulnik and Berta Gersten, but for me there is too much of it, and too many of the scenes are the same.

The time of the play is described as "then, not now." Neither Mordecai Gorelik, the scene designer, nor Ballou, the costumer, has sought to imagine what it might have been like in those ancient times; scenery and dress are half-way between the fanciful and the modern. But Odets has written "The Flowering Peach" in strictly modern idiom including slang and jokes.

Noah gets his message that God will destroy the world and arranges for a few survivors. His human survivors are an unruly lot; two sons are in love with the

wrong women and the women are in love with the wrong sons; the third son is strictly a conniver with a sharp eye for business. This Noah will not countenance, for he is the head man and he is absolutely pig-headed. Not until the end of the long cruise, when a personal tragedy softens him, does he realize that personal readjustments offer the only hope of peace among mankind.

A Splendid Noah

Skulnik is splendid as he splutters, shrugs, whines, pleads, commands, humbly talks with God and wishes he had a drink. It is a resourceful performance. Excellent, too, is the work of Miss Gersten as his wife. Mario Alcáide is upstanding as the son Japheth, who rebels against having an ancient code imposed on a brand new world. There also are nice performances by Martin Ritt, Leon Janney, Janice Rule, Barbara Baxley and Osna Palmer.

Odets directed his players in a performance which lags occasionally and sparkles at other times. Gorelik's two sets, of a hilltop and the Ark, are simple and admirable. Admirable, too, is the lighting by Abe Feder. Obviously, Feder must have used Ark lights.

"The Flowering Peach"—continued

Daily Mirror

December 29, 1954

'The Flowering Peach' Is An Interesting Play

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "The Flowering Peach," Clifford Odets retells the story of Noah, his family, the Ark and the flood in colloquial terms. He is evidently attempting to show that Noah was quite human and had his moments of inspiration, frustration, despair, weakness and strength, even as we do.

He has made Noah a dedicated man, but one who can be petulant, stubborn and obtuse as well. Son Shem is a go-getter, with a knack for increasing his substance. Ham is a waster and philanderer. Japheth is an idealist who rebels against what he considers God's cruelty in destroying the world.

THESE CONCEPTIONS are not

stated in the Bible, but are figments of Odets' imagination. He speculates as to whether the patriarch was saint or fool. He has Noah call his wife, Esther, "girlie," and to her he is "my boy." In his efforts to humanize Noah and his brood, Odets has resorted to slang such as one would ex-

pect on a vaudeville or musical-comedy stage.

The Belasco Theatre's new tenant has many amusing moments and some tender ones, but much of the humor is likely to offend the devout. For the author, in our opinion, has taken a story of power, told with poetic beauty, and turned it into a wise-cracking burlesque. Frankly, we were embarrassed on occasions.

Odets has doubtless sought to fashion about the story of Noah such a play as Marc Connelly wrought in "The Green Pastures." But the latter had a warming simplicity and an air of genuine reverence that we find lacking in the former. "The Flowering Peach," which was the first plant Noah saw after landing from the Ark, is a work of shifting moods, while "The Green Pastures" was of one quality.

The Producers Theatre has given the new arrival a most effective production. Mordecai

Gorelik's settings offer a series of eye-filling, atmospheric pictures, strikingly lit by Feder. And the cast is excellent.

MENASHA SKULNIK, who delighted Broadway in "The Fifth Season" for more than a year, plays Noah beautifully within the scope of Odets' writing. He is broadly funny, crotchety, pathetic and impressive by turns. Berta Gersten, as his spouse, is also amusing and touching. Mario Alcalde, Martin Ritt and Leon Janney are accurate representations of Odets' conception of the sons, while Janice Rule, Barbara Baxley and Osna Palmer are likewise as their wives.

"The Flowering Peach" is an interesting play. It aims high, though it sometimes misses the mark. Too often for comfort, we think. However, it is but fair to report that a majority of the first-nighters greeted it with robust laughter and applause.

The New York Times

December 29, 1954

Theatre: Family Life in Noah's Ark

'The Flowering Peach' Opens at Belasco

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MR. ODETS' new play is a beautiful one. His finest, in fact. "The Flowering Peach" he calls it. It opened at the Belasco last evening with a tender, lovely, humorous performance.

Imagine the fable of Noah's voyage told in terms of a temperamental though closely united Jewish family and there you have the plan of "The Flowering Peach." Years ago Mr. Odets came into the theatre with another play about a Jewish family. In "Awake and Sing" the members of the family were temperamental and united, too.

The tone of "The Flowering Peach" shows how far Mr. Odets has traveled since the cocksure days of "Awake and Sing." The brassy, ricocheting dialogue has matured into humorous, modest talk about great subjects that neither Mr. Odets, nor the rest of us are

likely to solve. For the new play is the story of mankind living out its destiny under the benevolent eye of God.

There were giants on the earth in those days of the Deluge. In spirit Noah was the greatest. It is Mr. Odets' mood not to put him on a pedestal but to characterize him as the worried head of a family of ordinary individuals—a peevish though loving hero who feels himself close to God. As Noah, Menasha Skulnik, previously celebrated as a low comedian, gives a memorable performance, in terms of comedy, temper, pettiness and devotion. Call it a masterpiece of character acting and you cannot be far from the truth.

No doubt, the first half of "The Flowering Peach" is the more endearing. The second half is a little repetitious and garrulous. But no matter, really, for the story of how Noah persuades his skeptical family that God has given all of them a mission, how they bicker, yet do the job obediently, how God helps them solve the most prodigious problems, how they scamper into the ark when the rains fall—all this, told with sympathetic humor in the form of a folk fable, ought to be

enough to delight and move any theatregoer.

In the second act the voyage concludes triumphantly with the grounding of the ark, the flowering of the peach and the departure of the family in their several ways to replenish and fructify the earth. It is a triumphant conclusion, but after a long series of quarrels and sorrows that symbolize the eternal questing of God's children.

Mr. Odets is every inch a theatre writer. That is probably the reason why this fantasy always seems real and human and respectful of the unseen Lord of the skies. As his own director and in association with other theatre artists, he has staged an idiomatic performance. Mordecai Gorelik has designed a whole series of settings in fable style; and Abe Feder, the lighting expert, has arranged sunshine, storms, nights and days and the final rainbow in a deeply emotional vein. Alan Hovhaness has composed an evocative musical score that serves the pulsing moods of the play admirably.

All honor to Mr. Skulnik for

his touching, humble, virtuosic performance. But Berta Gersten also contributes a notable performance. As Noah's wife, she plays with sardonic sharpness of speech, but with fortitude, patience and forgiveness as the matriarch of the race. She has stature and homely eloquence.

The other parts are well defined individuals. Martin Ritt is a tower of strength as Shem. Nor is there anything slovenly in the other characterizations. Mario Alcalde as a stubborn though capable Japheth, Leon Janney as a trivial-minded Ham, Osna Palmer as an industrious Leah, Janice Rule as a placid Rachel with a stone lying in her heart, Barbara Baxley as a coquettish Goldie who learns to respect some unworldly people—these are perceptive performances that grow in richness and understanding as the story tests the characters.

If you listen closely you can probably discover a message of hope for the sullen world of today. But Mr. Odets is not setting himself up as an oracle. He does not pretend to have the magic formula. Contemplating the long history of the race in terms of some disarming people, he is facing the world with respect and humility. "The Flowering Peach" is his testament to the endurance and native wisdom of mankind.

"The Flowering Peach"—continued

Journal  American

December 29, 1954

Hail Artistry Of Skulnik

Biblical Story by Odets
Produced With Distinction

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE verdict from here on "The Flowering Peach," the new Clifford Odets play which came into the Belasco last night is generally favorable. Menasha Skulnik is utterly irresistible, as ever, and in this he is given tremendous support by Berta Gersten, another graduate of the Yiddish theatre. Robert Whitehead has produced with distinction and taste; the settings are particularly attractive, but it seemed to me there were serious doldrums here and there in the story.

Mr. Odets has taken the Biblical legend of Noah and the Ark, fitted it out in rather timeless garb, with the speech following the familiar pattern of modern Jewish-American dialect. Noah is merely an aging father, the victim of

most human weaknesses, who has been chosen by God to build the Ark and thus preserve life on an earth which would otherwise have been decimated by the floods.

Into this the author has

woven a plot of intrigue within the family: the eldest son is too concerned with the practical rewards of life, the middle son with the flesh-pots, and the youngest with the spiritual. The father and mother, by no means without their small prejudices, try to keep some semblance of peace and honesty alive on a barge crawling with animals and a group of humans who are at strange variance with one another. The young boy is in love with the wife of the wastrel; he, in turn, has fallen for Goldie, an ex-lark; there are other complications involving even one of the lions on board.

In the complex world in which we dwell there is the temptation to read all sorts of symbols into Mr. Odets' effort. This could be something on the international level, with ideologies expressed by the various sons—but if that is the case I got lost along the way. It seemed to me the moral had to do with human frailty and a simple story of humility.

As such it is certainly warm and compelling most of the time. There are hundreds of laughs—as there must be with

Mr. Skulnik and such an accomplished foil as Mrs. Gersten—but there are also long lapses during which very little happens. Once one has become accustomed to the trick of doing Noah with modern talk the play itself must take charge, and not settle into a series of repetitious family wranglings.

This is of course a whale of a part for Mr. Skulnik, as Noah. First he is old, then he gets a little older, then he gets young, and finally he gets really old.

He is funny and pathetic and lovable, but he always has authority. Mrs. Gersten, as his wife, can match him take for take. There is the kind of thing where he says, "I want to tell you something," and she says, "So tell me—where am I? In Arabia?"

Janice Rule is prettier than ever. If that is possible, and Barbara Baxley is suitably seductive as the temptress. Honorable mention should also be given Leon Janney and Martin Ritt; and Mordecai Gorelik, for his settings.

This show should not burn up the boards, but it will probably keep them warm for some months to come.

NEW YORK
Herald  Tribune
December 29, 1954

THEATER

'The Flowering Peach'

By WALTER F. KERR

The Ark Mutiny

ACCORDING to Clifford Odets, that was a troublesome bunch Noah took along with him on the ark. Both Mr. and Mrs. Noah are heard to wonder, in the course of the new folk-poem at the Belasco, just why God happened to pick this particular family to save.

"The Flowering Peach" is a re-telling, in simple doll-like images and in occasional light-footed Yiddish rhythms, of the famous Biblical journey to Ararat. The cruise is not a serene one. Old man Noah must summon up all of his youthful prowess to knock out one of his sons—the one who wants to stay and die with humanity—in order to drag him aboard. He has no sooner got the family to sea than he discovers that God has apparently wiped out the whole world in order to "find all the sins" flourishing once again at close quarters.

Japheth is in love with Ham's wife. Ham is bitter and drunk

during most of the voyage. Shem is a business man, busy cornering the market in manure during the long sojourn on the waters and planning to own the earth once some earth is sighted. Even old loyal Esther, his wife of thirty or forty years is capable of defying Noah.

And Noah takes it hard. As Menasha Skulnik plays him—in a buttoned blue undershirt and crescent-shaped chin whiskers—he is a delightful old mule. We first meet him shying away from God's peremptory orders and nipping steadily at the bottle to buck himself up. "Don't be mad, God," he begs in his wistfully petulant whine, "but are you sure you're not making a mistake?"

Mr. Skulnik is endearing at his crustiest—when he is quarrelling with his shiftless sons, refusing to rearrange their love lives, or heading for a nine-week binge in the hold of the ship. When Mr. Odets gives him a gentle or tender gesture—patting his wife's shoulder and calling her

"old friend of mine," or chatting away with one of the ark's smaller animals cupped in his hand—he is irresistible. There are moments of happily stylized humor in the performance, too: Mr. Skulnik is to be seen commiserating with a lion that looks remarkable like him, calling "Polly, want a cracker?" to a soaring eagle, shielding his face with his hand so that he will not see his errant youngsters struck dead. In these flashes a genuine folk gaiety, as warm as it is impudent, takes over the stage.

There is a fly in the menagerie, though. Between its moments of moving sentiment and its zanier flights into comic fantasy, "The Flowering Peach" takes on something of the ennui of the original voyage. This stems, I think, from the point that Mr. Odets wants to make and from the slowly unfolding manner in which he hopes to make it.

There are intimations throughout the play that the characters themselves cannot imagine what the meaning of the voyage has been. "What was it for?" cries Noah in anguish, extremely late in the evening. There are hints that an explanation exists somewhere: "I know a mystery" murmurs Mrs. Noah as she disappears behind the cabin.

In the last few moments the mystery is explained. Noah has been proud. The rebellious humans he has tried to quell were

right all along, in their self-assertive planning for happiness.

The purpose of the trip has been to teach Noah humility. But Mr. Odets has not really dramatized the stern and unforgiving tyrant in Noah—it comes as a considerable shock to be told that Mr. Skulnik is less than perfection itself—and we spend vast portions of the evening listening to quarrels that seem merely petty, leading in no defined direction.

The company, under the author's direction, works hard and handsomely. Berta Gersten, a dumping of a woman in severe gray braids and tightly-clutched shawl, is superb as Noah's ancient, honest, wonderfully tart wife. Martin Ritt is a vigorous Ham, Janice Rule a lovely and long-suffering Rachel. Barbara Baxley swings a red parasol and peers cynically from beneath lowered eyelids as Goldie, a girl who doesn't quite belong in the family but comes along anyway. For picture-book backgrounds, Mordecai Gorelik has designed a sunlit hillside and a charming toy ark, and Feder has provided a stunning electrical storm.

"The Flowering Peach" has an imaginative outline and a ready supply of perceptive Odets lines. But it conceals its theme too well for too long, allowing the shipboard flareups to become repetitive and apparently rudimentary.

"The Flowering Peach"—continued

New York Post

December 29, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

Noah, the Ark and Menasha Skulnik

There isn't a more delightful and endearing actor in the contemporary theater than Menasha Skulnik, and Clifford Odets' idea of casting him as Noah was sheer inspiration. Mr. Odets' biblical fantasy, "The Flowering Peach," which opened last night at the Belasco, thereby has an admirable head start toward success, even though it is my fear that the central portion of this free retelling of the story of the man who built the Ark lacks the richly satisfying imagination of the opening scenes and fails to live up to the quality of its star.

The first moments of "The Flowering Peach" are, I think, complete enchantment. Noah, troubled, unsure of himself, believing firmly in the truth of the message from God that has come to him in his dream, but bewildered by the terrible task that

has been placed upon his feeble shoulders and unable to feel that he and his family are worthy of such an honor, is a real and touching figure. Only one of his sons, the youthful Japheth, is convinced that his father is anything but in his dotage, and even his faithful wife is among the doubters.

All of this is simple and moving in the writing, and it provides just the sort of characterization that Mr. Skulnik can play to perfection. Certainly nothing

I have seen all season is more memorable than the warmth, sweetness, sincerity and beautiful simplicity, a complete amalgamation of sadness and humor, that he brings to these scenes, and, on their basis alone, I can't imagine a finer performance or a more winning actor. Noah, grown successful and imperious after his prophecies have been justified, is much less interesting, but Mr. Skulnik isn't.

There are many other splendid things in Mr. Odets' play, including Mordecai Gorelik's sets and, in particular, Feder's lighting of them, which comes close to being the finest I have ever encountered. In addition to the fine beginning, "The Flowering Peach" has the advantage of a satisfying conclusion. When Noah is left alone, his wife dead and his children and their wives gone off, and God sends him the rainbow to comfort him, the quality of lyric simplicity that belongs to such a legend is beautifully captured.

Yet I can't help thinking the middle sections of the play are disappointing. Mr. Odets brings

up Japheth's rebellion against what he sees as God's cruelty in letting the rest of the world drown, and then seems to drop it. Nor do the episodes concerning Japheth's love for Ham's wife and Ham's for his brother's girl friend add to the value of the story. There is the feeling that the author is bent on making some contemporary editorial points, and isn't quite succeeding in clarifying them. His lyric imagination falters too frequently.

Mr. Skulnik's supporting cast is excellent. Berta Gersten is genuine and moving as the skeptical but understanding wife, and Janice Rule lives up to her promise in "Picnic" as the young wife who loves Japheth. There is effective work, too, by Martin Ritt as the go-getting Shem, Mario Alcalde as the rebellious Japheth, and, in somewhat equivocal roles, Leon Janney as the drunken Ham and Barbara Baxley as the light-of-love called Goldie. "The Flowering Peach" is somewhat dissatisfying, but Mr. Skulnik is immense.

"The Saint of Bleecker Street"

Journal of the American

December 28, 1954

Music Drama Is Thrilling

Menotti Libretto Suffers From Lack of Plausibility

By JOHN McCLAIN

"The Saint of Bleecker Street" which opened at the Broadway Theatre last night is described as a "music drama in three acts," but it more closely resembles a modern opera and hence most of it passes beyond the purview of this department.

As a dramatic effort, however, it has been brilliantly mounted by Chandler Cowles and directed with consum-

mate taste by Gian-Carlo Menotti, the composer and librettist. There seemed to me no doubt but that it was a

thrilling evening in the theatre.

Apart from the music, which is out of bounds in this column, I thought Mr. Menotti's story was adequate but not great. To be an old meanie and dissect the plot one cannot fail to become occasionally impatient with the plight of a young man who just doesn't want his sister to be a nun.

He kills his girl friend because she rather understandably (to me, anyway) wanted to attend a neighborhood wedding and taunted him with the fact that he was really in love with his own sister (the Saint).

And after this he roams around New York, appearing for various arias when required, but never bothered by the coppers until the last scene. Even the priest gives him sanctuary.

All of this seemed to serve as a perfectly suitable vehicle for Mr. Menotti's music. Who am I to say so, but what's against a more plausible plot?

"THE SAINT OF BLEECKER STREET"

Music drama with music, lyrics and book by Gian-Carlo Menotti; staged and orchestrated by Mr. Menotti; settings and costumes by Robert Randolph; lighting by Jean Rosenthal; conducted by Thomas Schippers; presented by Chandler Cowles at the Broadway Theatre, December 27, 1954. The cast:

Assunta..... Catherine Akos
Carmela..... Maria di Gerlando
Maria Corona.... Maria Mario
Her Dumb Son... Ernesto Gonzales
Don Marco..... Leon Lishner
Annina.... Virginia Copeland and
Gabrielle Ruggiero
Michele..... David Poli and
Davis Cunningham
Desideria..... Gloria Lane
Salvatore..... David Aiken
Concettina..... Lucy Beque
A Young Man... Richard Casselli
An Old Woman... Elizabeth Carron
Bartender.... Russell Goodwin
First Guest.... Keith Kaldenberg
Second Guest.... Jack Reardon
A Nun..... Dorothy Krebill
A Young Priest... Robert Barry

"The Saint of Bleeker Street"—continued

The New York Times

December 28, 1954

A Powerful Work of the Theatre Returns Christianity to the Common People

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE Mr. Menotti's work is an opera, "The Saint of Bleeker Street," which opened at the Broadway Monday evening, is being reviewed by Olin Downes, an old friend and colleague, in the adjoining cubicle.

It is this column's duty to make comments on the theatrical qualities of the opera. The duty is a pleasant one. For Mr. Menotti has provided us with a magnificent theatrical experience. "The Saint of Bleeker Street" is the most powerful drama of the season.

In his previous operas, Mr. Menotti has demonstrated no-

table theatrical talent as a craftsman and a stage director. Although his medium is music, he has an instinct for the theatre. His operas are vivid and alive. His characters are people.

In "The Saint of Bleeker Street" he has returned the Christian religion to the common people with whom it began. Amid the ashcans, torn newspapers and junk of the street corners and subway stations he has told a story that is both folk-tale and religious idyll. It is common in its incidents, though transcendent and exalting in the impression it creates.

From the literary point of view, "The Saint of Bleeker Street" is undistinguished. That is to say, Mr. Menotti's English style is perfunctory. The motivation of the characters is incomplete; and the plot—if there is a plot—is trivial.

But Mr. Menotti's medium of expression is music, which has passion and glory enough for this simple fable of ordinary people caught up in matters of spirit they can hardly understand. His sense of the theatre has purged the formalities of opera out of his drama and left us with its humanity.

As in many European theatres, the stage has been raised on an incline that gives Mr. Menotti's stage pictures a completeness that is new to Broadway. Robert Randolph's settings, which have been expressively lighted by Jean Rosenthal, are like the backgrounds to old religious paintings, and they serve to set off the figures of the actors like sculpture.

Visually, the whole work is remarkable. For the singers are vital people with fresh personalities that glow with sincerity. And the choruses, composed of the Italian neighbors in Bleeker Street, are individuals uncorroded by sophistication or cynicism.

As stage director, Mr. Menotti has handled them ingeniously, avoiding static groups and always laying the emphasis on the spontaneity of ordinary people taken out of themselves with religious wonder or mortal conflicts. There is a stirring processional in devotion to San Gennaro. In the last act the religious rites with which Annina takes the veil are staged with reverence and adoration that are at once solemn and triumphant.

The music is Mr. Menotti's tool of expression. But "The Saint of Bleeker Street" is all theatre, too. In a worn corner of this city, Mr. Menotti has found the people and the faith for a superb drama.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 28, 1954

THEATER

'The Saint of Bleeker Street'

By WALTER F. KERR

Mystic and Rebel

DURING the last few minutes of the first act of Gian-Carlo Menotti's new opera, a bizarre religious procession is passing—in a kind of gay solemnity—behind an iron-mesh fence in New York's Italian quarter. Children in home-made angel's costumes scamper ahead. An elevated statue teeters back and forth as it is borne beneath lighted arches spanning trash-littered streets.

The devout young men and women of the community want a saint-like girl—a girl who relives the Passion of Christ and bears the bloody stigmata each Good Friday—to join them in the feast. Her brother, an unbeliever desperately trying to adapt himself to the new world and to destroy the "ghetto" atmosphere in which his fellow Italians live, forbids her to appear.

Suddenly there is violence. The most passionate of the faithful paraders have turned

on the rebel brother, battered him nearly senseless, handcuffed him—with arms spread-eagled—to the fence, and borne the girl triumphantly off to further the cause of religion. The stunned brother, lying in defeat beside the rusty remains of an ancient automobile, is consoled by a blowy outcast who is no better than she should be.

The scene is fierce in its irony, brilliant in its dramatic color, enormously striking as a piece of stage machinery and as a suggestive idea. It foreshadows all that is best, and whatever is disturbing, in the latest Menotti work.

Here are the dynamic, sometimes dazzling, contrasts we have come to expect: a gathering of deeply religious neighbors, come to spend Good Friday with their mystic, erupt into a frenzied quarrel, sharply cut off by the entrance of a priest; a passage of liturgical music is shattered by the screams of the suffering girl; a stridently buoyant wedding-party, dancing to the

clatter of a jukebox, is directly followed by a slashing scene between the stubborn rebel and the 'slut' he will never marry. Everywhere the dramatic structure is forceful, cunningly inventive, courageous in its abandoned use of melodrama. Again and again the passions on stage rise to a stinging pitch of physical, vocal, and musical excitement.

The excitement is, however, the excitement of a deliberately wrought idea. One examines and relishes the bitter irony of the handcuffing sequence. The point, given only a moment or two to think about it, is trenchantly made. But while you are approving the ingenuity of the symbol, you are not really feeling anything for the man who is strapped there. Mr. Menotti has, perhaps for the first time, neglected to make us care for his people, to share the curious and urgent drives that speed them headlong into disaster.

The struggling principals seem to me to be clear enough as meaningful figures: the girl is the richest treasure of all that is traditional, and she dies praying for her brother; the brother is the most vigorous and powerful of the forces struggling toward a new kind of future, but he ends as a fugitive. The new and the old clash; something will come out of the crucible; at the moment both worlds exist in a state of anguished tension.

But whatever their clarity as figures, these baffled folk remain strangely impersonal. The scenes flash with angry vitality, the score—which will be touched on elsewhere in these columns this morning—expands into full and unembarrassed statement. And yet—to the end, and in spite of our fascination—we remain unmoved. Technically, the work is a powerhouse; emotionally, it keeps its distance.

A beautifully trained company, under the composer's own direction, sings and acts the five scenes brilliantly. Virginia Copeland, who will play alternate performances with Gabrielle Ruggiero, moved without difficulty Monday evening from the gentleness of her address to a friend who is being married to the open, aching sorrow of her last farewell to the brother she cannot save. David Poleri, who will alternate with Davis Cunningham, drove enormous conviction into his second-act aria of character revelation, "Where is my home?" And Gloria Lane's challenge to her runaway lover ("Love can turn to hate") rings out with devastating fire. Catherine Akos, Maria di Gerlando, Maria Mario, and Leon Lishner are all fine in lesser roles. Robert Randolph's settings—faintly stylized, rectangular compositions ranging from a cold-water flat to a subway station in winter-time—are clean, simple, and evocative.

"The Saint of Bleeker Street"—continued

Daily Mirror

December 28, 1954

'Saint of Bleeker St.' Has Power, Impressiveness

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Gian-Carlo Menotti has carved out a special niche for himself in our artistic scheme of things. He has penned a series of works less grand than grand opera, but more ambitious and serious than musical comedy. He calls his medium music theatre, or music drama.

"THE SAINT OF Bleeker Street," his latest, had a gala premiere at the Broadway Theatre Monday evening, under the sponsorship of Chandler Cowles. Though it is programmed as a music drama, which it is, it is also opera—no matter how you figure or describe it.

It is a lineal descendant of Italian "verismo," or realistic veristic opera. It is notable for beauty and violence. According to producer Cowles, its principal characters, a brother and sister, represent the conflict

every man has in reconciling religion and the world.

The sister is perceptive and mystic, while the brother is worldly and rebellious. From such a conflict, tragedy seems an inevitable offspring. The sister, sickly and saintly, a recipient of the "stigmata," finds peace and serenity in her last hours by entering a religious order through special dispensation.

THE BROTHER, WHO bitterly opposes her efforts to take the

veil and resents the neighbors' belief in her miraculous powers, eventually lands in the hands of the law after killing his sweetheart, a prostitute, when she invades a wedding celebration and chides him for being in love with his sister.

The action takes place in a flat on Bleeker St., a vacant lot on Mulberry St., a bar and a subway station. It is alternately somber, tempestuous, gay and ritualistic. It runs the gamut of moods in New York's "Little Italy." The episodes come to life against huge and accurate settings by Robert Randolph.

Libretto and music are both by Menotti, of course. He had also staged the work to emphasize all its color, eeriness and passion. Under Thomas Schippers' gifted baton, one of the largest orchestras ever to be heard in a Manhattan Theatre—over 60 pieces—plays the score brilliantly.

THE CAST IS LARGE and uniformly excellent. David Poleri, as the brother, and Virginia Copeland, as the sister, bring terrific emotional impact to their roles—

both vocally and historically. Gloria Lane, as the trouble-making trollop, has a briefer but equally demanding part, and brings it off magnificently.

Others meriting salutes are Leon Lishner, Maria Di Gerlando, Maria Mario, Catherine Akos and David Aiken. In fact, each and every member of the company deserves a bow from the waist.

"The Saint of Bleeker Street" lacks the giddy joyousness of "The Telephone," is less a tour-de-force than "The Medium," lacks the simplicity of "Amahl and the Night Visitors," and is less a theatre piece than "The Consul," previous Menotti works, which you may have seen and heard. But it has genuine power and impressiveness.

IN OUR OPINION, it is Menotti's most distinguished work to date. It is deeply moving and, at times, terrifying in its clashes of characters and philosophies. It is nerve-shattering for those willing to meet it on its own terms.

DAILY NEWS

December 28, 1954

'Saint of Bleeker St.' a Stunning Opera, Fulfills Menotti's Genius

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There can be no doubt now concerning Gian-Carlo Menotti's genius. His three-act opera, "The Saint of Bleeker Street," is a work of bold and stunning theatrical effectiveness, both as a musical work and as a drama. Chandler Cowles gave it a superb production last evening at the Broadway Theatre—a production which does great honor to the American stage.

Menotti did it all—wrote the libretto and the music, did the casting and directed it. About the only thing he didn't do was conduct the performance last evening. He left this to Thomas Schippers, a remarkably capable and sensitive young man, and Schippers had a wealth of music and musicians to work with. His principal singers were splendid, his chorus was admirable, and his fine big orchestra consisted mainly of Toscanini's men.

"The Saint of Bleeker Street"

is about a frail young woman of deep religious nature who lives in the Italian section of Greenwich Village. Her neighbors—particularly those who are afflicted—crowd into her cold-water flat on Good Friday; for often on this day the girl has had visions of the Crucifixion, and stigmata appear on her palms.

An Agnostic Brother

The girl lives with her brother, a young man of high and independent spirit who resents the church and the hold it has on his sister. Later in the spring he won't allow her to march in the neighborhood festival in honor of San Gennaro,

when the streets of the village are festooned with lights; so the Villagers tie him to an iron fence and bear his sister aloft in the procession honoring the saint.

At the wedding party of the girl's best friend, the brother commits a murder. He has been consorting with a neighborhood strumpet, and she is forbidden to join the happy celebrants. Bitterly she denounces the brother and accuses him, with vile implication, of being in love with his sister. In horror and rage at the accusation, he stabs the woman, runs out of the basement bar where the party is going on, and becomes a fugitive.

On a cold and snowy afternoon some months later, brother and sister have a secret rendezvous in a subway station, and she tells him that she is going to take the veil and become a nun. Angriily he warns her that if she does this,

when he needs her so much, he will put his curse upon her.

She Takes the Veil

Always ill, the girl now is dying in her dreary flat. By special permission of the church, she is taken into holy orders—and the instant the vastly impressive ceremony is ended, she dies.

Menotti's singers all are of top quality, and they are actors as well. Virginia Copeland sang the title role last night with great sweetness and appeal, and David Poleri's tenor voice made him outstanding as the brother. The most vivid and dynamic role of all—that of the strumpet—was splendidly played and sung by Gloria Lane, and there were excellent lesser performances by Catherine Akos, Maria Mario, Leon Lishner and David Aiken.

Menotti's score is a thing of thrills and surprises—sombre, gentle, gay and explosive in turn, and imaginatively orchestrated. It is a far richer work than any of the one-act operas Menotti has done, and is a wonderful musical theatre. It is the full expression of Menotti's gift for drama.

The four settings—the flat, and outdoor festival scene, the bar and the subway station—have been designed by Robert Randolph after four paintings by George Tooker. They are works of distinction.